



Katrin Pahl, *Tropes of Transport: Hegel and Emotion*

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Brushing Hegel Against the Grain

Tropes of Transport is a book that provides a new and inspiring perspective on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in view of its emotionality and philosophical imagery. It is in fact a series of essays commenting freely on various parts of Hegel's text without sticking to the order of Hegel's presentation. But this book, I would argue, is more than just a study of Hegel's discourse in its emotional dimension. Pahl treats the *Phenomenology* as a literary figuration, as a poem—thus making the text speak as a text, not merely as a neutral form to convey a systematic speculative message. But the author's real ambition is to show that the very idea of this message, Hegel's philosophical legacy, cannot be adequately understood without referring to this "external" textuality. Philosophy *is*, after all, a kind of writing.

Phenomenology of Spirit "intertwines the temporality of the three major literary genres: the syncopating measures of poetic rhythm, the virtual present of poetical enactment, and the folded sequence of narrative" (6; cf. 182ff.)—it is at the same time a poem, a drama, and a novel. It has to be staged, and also present—at least as an intention—the developmental narrative, merging the qualities of dramatic presentation and *bildungsroman*. But for Pahl, the key to its genre is that it resists linear reading and is read, rather, back and forth, reread always anew, with another accent. The text as a whole is interpreted as an "emotional judgment" (117) and the movement between the layers of meaning and various modulations of poetic utterance is described as "emotional syntax" (221)—this is what makes it most closely related to poetry. The text is directed at itself, performs itself for its own sake, something that clearly reminds of Jakobson's "poetic function of language" (1960).

In explaining how Hegel's text is written, Pahl refers to the "free indirect discourse" that "blurs the distinction between the voice of the nar-

rator and the voice of the character” (11) and presents a “mix of sincere identification and ironic distance” (196). In a poem, it is also often difficult to say who speaks and/or on whose behalf. But someone should speak! What, then, are the relations between the hero, the author, and the reader of the *Phenomenology*?

As both “hero” and “villain,” embodying as it does the transient spiritual form (11), the protagonist is neither strictly singular nor strictly plural, taking various shapes that figure and reflect one another, whilst still retaining their own identities. This is due to Hegel’s power of oblivion—something Adorno (1991) discussed in relation to the final scene of *Faust* (Goethe’s literary *Phenomenology*)—that erases the memory of the protagonist. Every time the protagonist is created anew it is only the phenomenologist who accumulates the experience (209). The stable instances of author and reader are also blurred by the Hegelian “we” that invites us, the readers, who are an essential part of Hegel’s project (128, 148), and the author to participate in the common (emotional) movement. This is a movement of mutual identification in which the protagonist/s strive to merge with the phenomenologist/s and vice versa—something Pahl also analyzes on the level of particular stylistic overtones (39ff.),¹ “the *Phenomenology of Spirit* inwardly trembles between the double genitive of its title” (154); spirit should describe itself, and traditional literary oppositions break down. What remains is ambivalence: we never know for sure who is suffering on this phenomenological path of despair, and we remain unable to decide (79).

Of course, Pahl is not the first to treat Hegel’s speculative prose as prose in its own right. For example, in *Hegel’s Recollection* (1985), Donald Phillip Verene tried to deal with some of the text’s metaphors (such as “topsy-turvy world”) and link them to Hegel’s philosophical endeavor; John H. Smith in *The Spirit and Its Letter* (1988) showed that rhetoric was essential for Hegel’s model of dialectics; Judith Butler in *The Subjects of Desire* (1987) elaborated on the composition of the *Phenomenology*. But Pahl’s close reading focuses on the language of emotions, that in a Hegelian manner constitute both the method and the substance of her study.

This is why the tropes studied by Pahl are those of *transport*. Hegel’s protagonists and readers are travelling. Indeed, the very movement of thought or reflection, Pahl argues, needs to be transported, and this is what emotions—as transports and not as passions or states—are for (215, 228). In Pahl’s account they become agents of disturbance and mediation,

¹ This idea is, however, abandoned when Pahl unambiguously identifies “the judging consciousness” in the chapter on Morality with the phenomenologist (201ff.). The problem here is not that most commentators would contest this interpretation, but rather that the very identification of the sort is at odds with the convergence as of the “author” and the “hero” as an allegedly general feature of the text.

initiating the internal ruptures within the purported immediacy and “authenticity” of feelings, introducing dynamics, theatricality and reflective irony into the seemingly closed and tautological space of the psyche.² Transport as a vibrant transformation of the self is thus both the key to the theory of emotion *and* the metaphor of Hegelian dialectics in the *Phenomenology*. Emotions are conceived as a real energy of the dialectical, as a “vehicle for self-transformation” (13), something that blurs boundaries and overthrows stable orderings. They are similar to the Kabbalistic notion of the *Tzimtzum*—God retreating back from Himself, allowing a void, a gap within the being, to appear creating the realm of finitude.³

Emotions, as Pahl suggests, are considered by Hegel as transports, that is, as something moving the subjects beyond themselves and thus externalizing the interior instead of perpetuating the inner play of sensitivity. Pahl attacks common interpretations of emotions as something *eigen*, authentic, and makes the case for the political inferiority of this doctrine (23). Dialectics, on the contrary, is an art for the self to create and maintain a distance from oneself. Hegel’s analysis on *The Law of the Heart and the Insanity of Self-Conceit* (1980: 202–07) suggests that when consciousness feels the authenticity of its own emotion, it ends up hating mankind, stagnating in a political impasse, a sort of “psychic paralysis” (27),⁴ being neither willing nor able to change anything in the imperfect external world. Instead, on Pahl’s interpretation, Hegel creates the regime of emotional exposure (this is her rendering of Hegelian *Entäußerung*) and, in a compensatory manner, the literary figuration. This interpretation of emotions should make emotionality a way to escape the irrational violence often associated with the intensity and impetuosity of feeling, and to gain plasticity that, along with sympathy, must form the core of the new emotional ethics (10).

In view of this, *pathos* as an emotional form is considered (quite Hegelian, indeed) as an opposition between “natural” and “fabricated” emotion with the latter providing a real way to the self-transformation of spirit by making it plastic and flexible, by creating a flickering of perspectives and subjects out of it “so that there is never a complete destruction of the subject in the *Phenomenology*” (51). This *pathos* is “theatrical” in that it provides an externalization, suspending the strong dichotomy between inner and outer by staging “the ek-stasy of passion” (58). The very

² In this, Pahl draws on the theory of emotions in the work of Rei Terada (2001) and Hélène Cixous (1992).

³ Emotion is something estranged and postponed, in the non-identity of experience allowing genuine experience only as displaced and belonging to someone else. Transports constitute the slow, sticky, hesitant and vibrating temporality of the *Phenomenology*.

⁴ Hegel also refers to paralysis in *Phenomenology* when describing the inability of formal knowledge to grasp the unrest of the dialectical (1980: 34).

idea of borrowing the model of “true spirit” from Greek tragedy, Pahl contends, problematizes and relativizes the immanent, or naturalizing, idea of pathos and brings the theatrical or ironic element into play. The spatial interpretation of *Aufhebung* suggests that any motion or gesture in the life of the spirit involves a reflective turn and the never fully dissolvable rest as a spectator (or, rather, the never-to-be-fully-defined multiplicity of spectators) of the phenomenological scene.

On the one hand, pathos seems to be a model for the whole series of phenomenological forms since each “figure of consciousness... is a dramatic character who realizes its (epistemological) pathos” (65). Similarly, to the particular struggle within the “ethical life” of the Greeks, each figure ends with a total loss. Pahl suggests that in the *Phenomenology*, there is no accumulation of meaning, no “benefit” from the previous forms, each pathos is doomed to a fundamental loneliness (hence Pahl’s rejection of linearity and the case for suspension and emotional trembling back and forth between the immanent and the reflective). On the other hand, this identification is destructive and does not allow the text to be completed, nothing in the death of any figure would indicate the possibility of the next one and thus of the story to be continued. The very act of identification with their *Gestalt*, so prominent in Hegel’s account of *pathos*, makes his figures so vulnerable and exposed to the further movement of self-devouring dialectic.

The phenomenological text in general, the majestic “We,” as Pahl argues, treats its own figures that died away with a remarkable indifference⁵—since only the rupture, the conflict, the contradiction, are interesting to the phenomenologist, and not the work of mourning. Figures are left to rest in their partiality, and the narrative goes forward: “The unhappy consciousness remains unhappy” (171), and “[o]nly when the text is about to end is it able to gesture toward the skeletons at its closet. At its limit, the *Phenomenology* acknowledges its finitude, conjures up a friend, and dissolves in tears” (85).

Pahl undermines the generally optimistic account of Hegel’s project by reminding us that the *Schädelstätte des Geistes*—the Golgotha of absolute spirit—appearing at the end of the *Phenomenology* as the site of apotheosis experienced by the absolute knowledge is something of a heap of bones. This is to some extent true, but Resurrection and Redemption are usually also connoted with the *Calvary*: all the forms we forget are at once recollected. For Pahl, this remembering is at the same time dismembering (207), but her arguments for this reading of absolute knowledge are not as clear and convincing as they could have been.

Hegel’s text ends, as is well known, with Schiller’s poem proclaiming the infinity that “foams forth” (Hegel 1977: 493). Pahl treats this

⁵ One of the most important words in Hegel’s phenomenological vocabulary characterizing, ironically, the stagnation and rigidity of the non-dialectical.

foaming as an *ejaculation* that is finally directed onto itself instead of being lost in the “chalice of phenomenological inquiry” (85ff.). In fact, what Pahl describes in this provocative reading—reminding us inadvertently of Werner Hamacher’s never-to-be-forgotten invitation “Hegel melken,” or “to milk Hegel” (1978: 328), and alluding to an ineluctable end of the romantic relationship of the dialectic as “a mutual penetration and a mutual embrace of reader and text” (129)⁶—is similar to so-called retrograde ejaculation, with the spiritual insemination dressed as a recollection of past forms which, in its repetitive diction, looks like “an abortion of the project of self-knowledge” (85). The break Pahl finds in absolute knowledge (in the strange syntax of the last sentence⁷) is connected to the last act of release, when there is nothing else for Hegel to pour into the chalice of the *Phenomenology*, as “a conscious gesture of exposing his work to alteration and dispersal” (96). Pahl puts this emotional release into the context of the finitude of the whole text, its historical situatedness and its limitations despite the proclaimed infinity of the absolute knowledge.⁸ The end station of the *Phenomenology* coincides with the first, precarious one, and its final truth, in the syncopating rhythm of the interaction with Schiller’s poetry, becomes the evanescent truth operating within the figure of the *Sense-Certainty* (Hegel 1980: 63–70)—something that can be changed by merely writing it down and interpreting it. This is the way Pahl sees Hegel’s text as being exposed to her own sovereign reading, thus making the standard justification of this

⁶ Indeed, Hegel’s skepticism is read as “the foreplay to the lovemaking of concepts” (131), while elsewhere, in the discussion of fear, Pahl describes the fear of consciousness to surrender to the “play of forces” in the object as voyeurism and masturbation needed to avoid the “erotic danger” of the speculative orgy. On the lasting importance of fellation and insemination in Hegel cf. the comments by Derrida (1974: 35ff. left column) followed by Lacoue-Labarthe (“il faut imaginer le spéculatif comme un onanisme fécond” [1975: 66]).

⁷ “[B]eide zusammen, die begriffne Geschichte, bilden die Erinnerung und die Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes, die Wirklichkeit, Wahrheit und Gewißheit seines Throns, ohne den er das leblose Einsame wäre” (Hegel 1980: 434). This sentence strangely refers to the masculine (*ohne den*, that is, without the throne), although it should obviously be *ohne die*. However, unlike Pahl, I do not see a big problem here. The German *Thron*—as is clear from and other contexts—is considered as something much more general than a “dead symbol” (89) and can be seen as the whole way the spirit should travel before reaching Absolute Knowledge.

⁸ This analysis is not uncontroversial in some of its details. For example, I cannot share the opinion that “the operative notion of truth for the protagonist throughout the *Phenomenology*,” the one we, allegedly, dispense with at the end of the book, is “the notion of truth as categorical and unchangeable” (97ff.). However, I can only endorse Pahl’s general perspective that asks why the book that should have staged the victory of the Concept over the Image (or *Vorstellung*) ends with the apotheosis of poetry.

reading superfluous, since the reading and the text itself must ground each other in dialectical movement. And that is why, at some point, I cannot judge this account in a simple linear and unilateral way (for example, one could demand other, more “substantial” reasons for undermining the ultimate mightiness of the absolute knowledge—something only tangentially discussed in the text).

The inherent multiplicity and heterogeneity of emotionality breaking linear and stable accounts is something that determines Pahl’s discussion of Hegel’s method as well, or, as she puts it, his *rhythm*—the rhythm of the concept. Reading Hegel’s account of the “speculative sentence” Pahl considers it a *juggle* (this is how *schweben* is translated), a constant hovering back and forth that creates instability and makes the text itself emotional. Hegel’s text trembles, moving between different epochs and cultural forms, oscillating between linear time and flashes of fear (see 180). Following the rhythm of the concept involves mimicry and sympathy. It is moving, in that it creates transports between the selves (115). Pahl’s text mimics this movement, for Pahl also moves between Hegel’s chapters and trembles between the detached and emotional prose.

It is in this pulsation of meanings that she discusses the form necessary for the philosophical writing and the penetration of the poetic into Hegel’s text as something that requires this unusual—juggling—reading and thinking (102). In this context, Hegel’s theory of the speculative sentence emerges as the key of his method. Pahl’s analogy is, roughly, between the poetic (or speculative), on the one hand, and the prose (or the argumentative structures of understanding) on the other. This creates a reality that invites us all to dance, as Pahl puts it. But this dance is unstable and “always haunted by death” (118) since the speculative should mediate the finite forms and remains dependent on them. Hegel’s self-consciousnesses, encountering each other and being at once exposed to the irreducibility of one another, are not bound by *recognition*, but rather, as Pahl suggests, mutually *acknowledge* one another, thus losing control over themselves and engaging in the precarious being—exposed to each other. Acknowledgement can only be mutual, so no need for recognition is to be sought by Hegelian subjects (134). But this mutuality is not something that can create stable structures, in its movement of externalization and self-estrangement it is, rather, transient and fragile, and this claim is indeed decisive in Pahl’s account. It is in this vein that she reads Hölderlin’s *Andenken* in which no real “recognition” or reunion of lovers will ever take place. This is seen as parallel to the fate of glimmering subjects populating the *Phenomenology*—subjects who are about to dissolve into the multitude in a “movement of mutual acknowledging” (148). The *Anerkennen* is never perfect, for the very act of mutual acknowledging changes the subjects and keeps the process open-ended.

Transport is a bodily matter. This is well illustrated in the trembling of fear that is considered another emotional aspect of dialectics, but also as its physical counterpart.⁹ Indeed, Hegel's reference to the trembling body of the slave in the chapter on "Self-Consciousness" illustrates how bodily experience enters the phenomenological discourse, but also underlies Pahl's project of externalizing emotions. Hegel's own text is conceived as a trembling movement of the transports, with the moments of absolute fear as momentary transitions (15), not graspable in the dialectical movement, and with Hegel's figures invoking each other's tremble in remembrance and anticipation.

The moment of synthesis in Hegel's dialectic does not consist in the next higher form of consciousness, but precisely in this turning point, this blank, this flash of an instant that cannot be grasped because it is the concept itself that trembles and turns at this instant (177).

This trembling is seen in Hegel's repetitive figuration of backward movement when the development is thrown back into the previous stages. "For the narrative of the *Phenomenology*, the only possibility to escape this eternal return is the leap into the next chapter" (179). *Phenomenology* is not a continuous text, each figure is self-sufficient in its inevitable collapse,¹⁰ the text is torn apart (204ff., cf. 167). Sometimes, however, it seems that Pahl does treat the *Phenomenology* as a continuous narrative: by invoking the ever new scars and the growing fear that changes the shape consciousness takes (199), or by referring to the protagonist and the phenomenologist (both singular now) as old acquaintances who learn more and more about each other (201).

What is missing in the general perspective of this remarkable book is not the voices of Hegel or Hegel scholarship (Pahl is extremely generous and immensely knowledgeable in both respects), but the particular modulations of these voices. I cannot say that the author ignores these modulations; they are mentioned, but, I surmise, are not taken seriously enough. And it is here that Pahl's reading—emotional and, hence, vulnerable in itself—seems most controversial to me.

Pahl sees very well that Hegel *wants* to stabilize his discourse (173ff.), to invoke (for example, in the chapter on Reason) speculative closure of recognition (not acknowledging!), to renounce unending, cy-

⁹ Pahl is right in emphasizing the phenomenon of trembling—indeed, it figures prominently in Hegel's theory of sound in the *Philosophy of Nature* and *Aesthetics* (Hegel 1970; 1975) as the preparation of the speculative negativity. See Derrida's *The Pit and the Pyramid* (1982).

¹⁰ Pahl claims that the emotional movement of despair never ends (185)—the subject never fully coincides with herself and thus will never find peace.

cling processes and to assert the absolute power of this speculative knowledge. But he does not succeed, and this is what Pahl's interpretation is about—this is what Hegel's text shows beyond its explicit self-understanding. However, the conclusions Pahl draws from this sound all too optimistic for me. The collapse of the text, its complete failure turns out to be merely a virtual possibility, which it is not. I do not mean that the ambiguities and tensions of the speculative discussed by Pahl—like that of a hero dying and not dying at the same time, or an emotion as entanglement of the highest sincerity and irony—are something impossible or unacceptable, to be abandoned in favor of a serenity promised by speculative synthesis or of something indisputable and unsublatable. But I think that Pahl makes too much of the lightheartedness (224) and orgiastic pleasure (207ff.) given by the power of transport. Perhaps I am among those who do not “get the levity of taking tears excessively seriously” (263), but for me, who tries to take Pahl's own analysis seriously enough, the breaks and tears of Hegel's text are too real and irreversible to leave us with the ambivalence of emotion. Rather, they allude to the last dance, the swan song, of the speculative philosophy. Underlying the lightheartedness, Hegel's irony, the ability to relativize the given, is not an easy gesture—it is, rather, radically contingent, almost inexecutable. And it is this impossibility one has to face in order to grasp the textuality of the *Phenomenology*. But to accomplish this, one has to go beyond the account of emotionality—something *The Tropes of Transport* so brilliantly presents—to consider Hegel's own historical situation, to do justice to the vicissitudes of his contexts, and thus to further unpack his constant struggle for infinity in absolute disruption. Pahl's work is (unambiguously) an important step in this direction.

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